

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

February 23, 2011

GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 6385 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION

Good evening Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, and members of the Education Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Alan Addley and I am the Superintendent of Granby Public Schools. I am here in reference to the Governor's Bill No 6385 an act implementing budget recommendations concerning education.

This is my annual petition in front of this committee to support increased funding to suburban districts for accepting urban students through the Open Choice program. The current level of state funding is simply not adequate to fulfill the constitutional, moral and social obligations to the children of the Greater Hartford region. My message remains the same; direct as much money as possible towards the Open Choice program and support the Governor's and State Department of Education's proposed tiered funding formula that could potentially bring up to \$6,000 per student to a district depending on a district's participation rate.

Granby has enthusiastically enrolled Hartford students through the Open Choice program (formerly Project Concern) since its inception over thirty years ago and we continue to do what is right for the children of Hartford and Granby as reflected in an Open Choice enrollment of 3.5% with plans to increase this further. However, despite our good intentions, it is becoming increasingly harder to participate at this level with the current state funding and a growing unrest of a community who see the inequity in the current funding.

The costs associated with Open Choice for the suburban towns are not incidental. Zero budgets, staff reductions and unpredictable magnet school tuition costs compound the problem and simply magnify the inadequacies in Open Choice funding. As you know, the current level of Choice funding is \$2,500 per student. Granby's cost per student minus transportation and special education costs is much closer to \$10,000. Without additional funds, the suburban towns will be asked to educate Hartford children at about twenty-percent of what it takes to educate a child in the state. We urge the legislature to embrace and support an additional funding provision. In doing so, I would ask that any additional funding that is provided is calculated on the basis of every Hartford student attending a suburban district and not just for new students that are enrolled through Open Choice.

We know that there is keen interest in the Open Choice Program from Hartford parents for limited spaces made available by surrounding districts. Declining enrollments across the state mean that there is space in the suburban schools. In order to meet the Sheff goals by 2012-2013, it would be necessary for districts

to increase the number of available seats to Hartford residents by three to six percent of their total student population. Suburban school districts have been clear in their message that magnet schools, legislation permitting the Commissioner of Education to mandate placement and other ideas such as Crandall Schools are not the answer and only deflect dollars away from the Open Choice Program. I think it's clear that the potential to meet the Sheff stipulated agreement lies in Open Choice – it's time for the state to seize the opportunity. If the state is willing to do the right thing so will school districts.

Even if the state were somehow fortunate enough to make some of its participation targets stipulated by the Sheff agreement, I am fearful that without adequate funding, equity of outcomes for Hartford students attending suburban schools will not be realized. We want our Hartford students graduating from our suburban schools equally prepared for college. Equity of outcomes for our Hartford students requires equity in funding.

If the state is serious about addressing the Sheff settlement and is serious about resolving this constitutional, moral and equity issue, then it must take the responsibility for funding this effort. In the meantime, I am just hopeful that you will not lose the good will of those local communities that believe in these initiatives.

Thank you for your time.